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ABSTRACT

The dialect of English as spoken by native Puerto Rican Spanish speakers is estensively influenced by interference from the speakers' native language. Since exposure to a language affects one's ability to use it, the speaker's position might affect his access to English and/or his willingness to speak it, and, therefore, his proficiency in it. It is important for a teacher to be aware of the conflicting linguistic features of Spanish and English which cause difficulty for a Puerto Rican child learning standard English as his second language. (This module provides an overview of interference in morphological, syntactic, and lexical areas. A pretest and posttest are included, along with a list of learning strategies and a four-item bibliography.) (Author/MJM)

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TEACHER CORPS BILINGUAL PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
WEST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
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MODULAR SEQUENCE: PUERTO RICAN PUPILS IN MAINLAND SCHOOLS

TTP 003.09 PUERTO RICAN ENGLISH

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RATIONALE

The dialect of English as spoken by native Puerto Rican Spanish speakers is extensively influenced by interference from the speakers' native language. "Interference phenomena, however, do not exist in isolation from the social or ideological position of the person who exhibits them."[1] Since exposure to a language affects one's ability to use it, the speaker's position might affect his access to English and/or his willingness to speak it, and, therefore, his proficiency in it. Sociological and motivational considerations aside for the moment, it is important for a teacher to be aware of the conflicting linguistic features of Spanish and English which cause difficulty for a Puerto Rican child learning standard English as his second language.

Although phonological interference is frequently the most extensive, this module provides an overview of interference in morphological, syntactic, and lexical areas as well.

OBJECTIVES

Given a series of learning alternatives on Puerto Rican English, the participant will be able to:

- -identify English sounds that are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker.
- -identify the suprasegmental features of Puerto Rican English.
- -list the morphological features of English that are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker.
- -compare/contrast the significant syntactic features of English and Spanish.
- -identify the English lexical features that cause a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker difficulty.

PRE-ASSESSMENT

To assess your prior mastery of the terminal objectives of this unit of work, complete the following exercise. Your performance on this assessment will determine which learning tasks you are to perform.

Directions: Answer the following in short essay or outline form:

I. Identify the English sounds that are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker and indicate the approximate substitution he/she makes for each.

II. What are the suprasegmental features of Puerto Rican English speakers?

III. Which English morphological features are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker to master?

IV. Compare/contrast the significant syntactic features of English and Spanish.

V. Which lexical features of English cause a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker the most difficulty?

I. Learning Alternatives: Select 2 of the following.

A. Read the narrative "Puerto Rican English" included in the module.

B. Conduct library research on the contrastive features of Puerto Rican Spanish and English.

C. Interview a teacher of Puerto Rican children to determine the characteristics of Puerto Rican English.

D. Monitor a Puerto Rican English speaker and record the features of his dialect that are influenced by interference from his native language.

E. Design your own learning activity.

F. Attend a seminar as scheduled by your module facilitator.

POST-ASSESSMENT

Directions: Answer the following questions according to the directions noted in each:

I. Identify the English sounds that are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker and indicate the approximate substitution he/she makes for each.

II. What are the suprasegmental features of Puerto Rican English speakers?

III. Which English morphological features are difficult for a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker to master?

IV. Compare/contrast the significant syntactic features of English and Spanish.

V. Which lexical features of English cause a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker the most difficulty?

Competency will be certified when your module coordinator has ascertained that the submitted post-assessment is of acceptable quality.

Remediation: Alternate learning activities are available on a contractual basis with the module coordinator.

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PUERTO RICAN ENGLISH

The dialect of English as spoken by native Puerto Rican Spanish speakers is extensively influenced by interference from the native language. "Interference phenomena, however, do not exist in isolation from the social or ideological position of the person who exhibits them."[1] Since exposure to a language affects one's ability to use it, the speaker's position might affect his access to English and/or his willingness to speak it, and, therefore, his proficiency in it. Sociological and motivational considerations aside for the moment, however, it is important for a teacher to be aware of the conflicting linguistic features of Spanish and English which characterize the Puerto Rican English "dialect" and which cause difficulty for a Puerto Rican child learning standard English as his second language. Although phonological interference is frequently the most extensive, interference can occur in morphological, syntactic, and lexical areas as well.

PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE

Consonants

The English sound system contains 25 single consonant sounds, while Spanish has 16. The following English consonant sounds do not occur in Puerto Rican Spanish:

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[1] Williams, p. 111.

ENGLISH	Approximate Substitution
v = vine	ɒ = very, berry
z = zoo, boys	s
θ = think	s = sink
ð = they	d = dey
ʃ = shoe	ch = "my chews" (shoes)
ʒ = measure	dʒ
ŋ = ring	n = rin
w = woman	
hw = what	
j = yellow	dʒ = jello

While the following consonant sounds occur in both languages, they are pronounced differently in each:

LETTER	SOUND	SPANISH	ENGLISH
ch	tʃ	muchacho	occurs as cluster (church)
d	d	/ð/ between vowels (lather)	/d/ (ladder)
g	h	before e & i (gente)	/dʒ/ before e & i (gentle)
h	-	never pronounced	(hot)
j	h	(julio)	/dʒ/ (July)
ll	dʒ	pollo =/podʒo/	occurs as cluster (Apollo)
ñ	ny	mañana	(canyon)
r	r	pero (like British flap = "veddy" for "very"	(rain)
rr	rr	carro = trilling	occurs as cluster (marry)

y	dʒ	ayer (pronounced like judge)	(your)
y(&)	i	(like ee)	very
z	s	diez	(dice)

Although many of the same consonant clusters occur in both languages, they do not occur in all positions (initial, medial and final) in Spanish:

1. /kt/ occurs in the middle position in Spanish but not in the final position (e.g., acto, octavo). As a result, Spanish speakers have a tendency to say /æk/ for act, /wɔk/ for walked, and/laɪk/ for liked.

2. The folowing consonant clusters do not occur in the initial position in Spanish:

sc	screw	str	street
sk	sky	fy	few
sl	sleep	ky	cure
sn	snow	by	beautiful
sp	speak	py	pure
spr	spring		
sq	square		
st	store		

/sp/ is preceded by /ɛ/ in Spanish; small, therefore, becomes esmall, and speak is pronounced espeak.

3. The consonant clusters noted below do not occur in the final position in Spanish, so the Spanish speaker's tendency towards cluster simplification results in the "dropping" or altering of the final member of the cluster:

land	lan'	help	hel'
hunt	hun'	milk	mil'
fast	fas'	health	heal'
fence	fen'	first	firs'
old	ol'	ask	as' ~ aks
box	bos(k)	left	lef'
melt	mel'	film	filn
desk	des ~ deks	tenth	ten'

Vowels

The English phonetic alphabet contains 11 single vowel sounds, while Spanish has 5. The following do not occur in Spanish:

Sound		Approximate Substitution	
/ɪ/	bit	/i/	beat (Irma > Earma)
/ɛ/	bet	/e/	bait (of shorter duration)
/æ/	pat	/a/	pot
/ə/	about		reduction not completed /biutiful/
/ɔ/	bought	/o/	boat (of shorter duration)
/ʊ/	foot	/u/	food

The following English diphthongs cause difficulty for a Spanish speaker because they do not occur in Spanish:

/iə/	beer	/biə/
/uə/	newer	/nur/
/ɛə/	dare	/dea/
/ɔə/	pour	/poa/

Since there are no triphthongs in Spanish, all English triphthongs cause difficulty. The greatest interference in this area is derived from the tendency of a Spanish speaker to pronounce each vowel separately.

SUPRASEGMENTAL PHENOMENA

For the Puerto Rican Spanish speaker, the contrasting suprasegmental phenomena--stress, rhythm, pitch, and juncture--

cause interference in similar fashion. According to Saville and Troike (1971), "the Spanish intonational system has one less degree of stress than English, different stress and thythmical patterns, and different intonational contours. A speaker of Spanish is likely to give every syllable a nearly equal length of time, to shorten English stressed syllables, to put strength on the wrong syllable, and to fail to reduce vowels to /ə/ in unstressed syllables."[2] The essential difference between the two systems is that Spanish lacks reduced stress, which, coupled with the absence of emphatic lengthening, results in every syllable receiving a nearly equal length of time.[3] In English, syllable division rarely carries over the consonant when the next syllable begins with a vowel; Spanish carryover is a fundamental characteristic of the sound structure of the language.

While the above features characterize the speech of many Puerto Rican Spanish speakers as "accented," some suprasegmental differences interfere with comprehension and can cause significant misunderstanding. For example, the Spanish speaker frequently is unable to distinguish between pairs of words in English which differ primarily in terms of stress, such as "cónvict" and "convíct." In addition, the Spanish speaker often cannot contrastively emphasize words or phrases by shifting stress. Furthermore, the major differences in Spanish and English intonation contours sometimes result in English sounding excited or exaggerated to a Spanish speaker, and Spanish sounding annoyed or angry to an English speaker.[4]

MORPHOLOGY

Morphology, the study of word formation, is another aspect of language study which points up similarities and differences between English and Spanish. Although each language has its specific rules for formation of the plural, they are reasonably consistent and cause little interference:

Spanish	English
1. nouns ending in an unstressed vowel add -s (el libro/los libros)	1. nouns ending in vowels or voiced consonants except /z/ and /ž/ add /z/ (game/games)
2. nouns ending in a consonant add -es (el avión/los aviones)	2. nouns ending in voiceless consonants except /s/ and /š/ add /s/ (wrap/wraps)
3. nouns ending in -z change -z to -c and add -es (la luz/las luces)	3. nouns ending in /z/, /ž/, /s/, and /š/, add /ɪz/ as another syllable. (dish/dishes)
4. some nouns remain unchanged in the plural (martes = Tuesday or Tuesdays)	4. some nouns remain unchanged in the plural (one sheep/three sheep)

The Spanish rules for plural formation are essentially based on spelling (orthography), while in English they are based on the word-final sound (phonology).

The formation of verb tenses in English is a morphological area which causes a great deal of difficulty for many Spanish speakers. The essential difference between the two languages centers around the use of auxiliary verbs and suffixes in English vs. inflected endings in Spanish:

Spanish	English
Los niños jugaron a la pelota.	The children played ball.
El muchacho jugará.	The boy will play.
Yo voy a cantar.	I am going to sing.

Another area which causes interference involves the selection of appropriate prepositions. A case in point is "en':

La bola está en la caja.	The ball is in the box.
Yo vivo en la calle Main.	I live on Main Street.
Yo vivo en el 20 de la calle Main.	I live at 20 Main Street.

Since Spanish doesn't distinguish among "in," "on," and "at," the Spanish speaker has difficulty gaining control of these prepositions in English.

Additional areas of interference concern possessives (el libro de Juan - the book of Juan), adjective agreement and position (la blanca nieve - the while snow; el libro blanco - the white book), and regular and irregular comparisons:

Spanish	Gloss	English
fácil	easy	
más fácil	more easy	(easier)
el más fácil	the most easy	(easiest)
menos fácil	less easy	

bueno	good	malo	bad
mejor	better	peor	worst
(lo) mejor	best	peor	worst

SYNTAX

Syntax is the aspect of a language which deals with the arrangements of words in phrases and sentences, as well as the agreement among these elements. Because of word order, "They are staying overnight," and 'Are they staying overnight?" express two different ideas. The following patterns[5] indicate some of the similarities between English and Spanish:

Spanish	English
El libro está aquí.	The book is here.
Mi casa es grande.	My house is big.
Este es mi papá.	This is my father.
La casa está cerca de la escuela.	The house is near the school.
La muchacha cantó y bailó.	The girl sang and danced.

Despite these similarities, however, there are numerous differed in the syntax of the two languages which cause interference:

¿Dónde vive la niña?	Where live the girl?
El muchacho le dió el libro.	The boy (to her) gave the book.
Es redondo.	Is round.
Mariá no está aquí.	Mary no is here.
Esta mesa es más grande.	This table is more big.
Esta mesa es el más grande.	This table is the most big.
No corra.	No run. (do not run)
Ella es estudiante.	She is student.
La Señorita Juarez está aquí.	The Miss Juarez is here.

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5 Examples taken from Hartford ESL Curriculum

Yo vivo en la calle Main.	I live in the street Main.
Hace calor.	Makes warm. (It is warm.)
Hubo un accidente.	Was an accident.
¿Las muchachas estudian?	The girls study?
Este es el papá de Juan.	This is the father of Juan.
Yo lo veo.	I it see.
Esta es la casa grande y nueva.	This is the house big and new.
¿Es grande la casa?	Is big the house?

Additional differences include the Spanish adverb placement immediately following the noun ("He speaks very well English"), double negation ("He didn't do nothing"), the invariant form of the reflexive (English uses "-self" sparingly in comparison), gender- vs. sex-oriented selection of pronouns, varying use and agreement of possessives, and the existence of "do-" support in English. Although there is consistent subject-verb agreement in both languages in terms of number, English denotes sex rather than gender, and uses "it" with great frequency. In addition, the use of tag questions such as "isn't it?" or "aren't they?" or "won't you?" appear unending to the Spanish speaker who is familiar with only "¿verdad?"or ¿no es verdad?".

Although there are numerous other areas of contrast between English and Spanish,[6] the interference factors noted above account for the largest percentage of morphological and syntactic interference in the Puerto Rican speaker's English.

LEXICON

Essentially words in use in a language are of three different types: 1) those indigenous to the language, 2) cognates, and 3) borrowed words. Those that cause the greatest interference are, of course, deceptive cognates. While "hotel" and "calendar" mean virtually the same thing in both Engish and Spanish (barring cultural limitations), "asistir" means "attend," not "assist." Words which are similar in meaning but different inform ("tree" and "arbol") cause interference only when the two language systems are not separate. Words which are different in form and meaning, however, can interfere in comprehension. For example, "first floor" and "primer piso" signify two physically different locations, the latter being the first floor above the ground floor. New form types, such as two-word verbs, can also cause difficulties, such as "call" vs. "call up." Spanish uses "telefonear" (to telephone) and "llamar por telefono (call by telephone). Words which are similar in primary meaning but differ in connotation are also problem areas. For example, "banco" and "bank" both signify "an institution for receiving and lending money." However, "bank" in English can also mean "the slope immediately bordering a stream; in Spanish, this definition applies not to "banco" but to "orilla." Conversely, in Spanish "banco" can also mean "bench." In addition, different connotations can also result in the embarrassing use of taboo words; for example, "Dios mio" and "Jesus" are not as readily acceptable in English as they are in Spanish.

Literal meanings of words can cause equally as much interference as connotations. The word "hasta," for example, means either "until" or "as far as:"

Viajaron hasta Nueva York.	The traveled as far as New York.
Viajaron hasta las seis.	The traveled until six o'clock.

The English translation indicates the area of difficulty. Literal translations, too, of idioms result in similar interference:

Tengo hambre.	(Literally) I have hunger.

The distribution of words in Spanish and English varies with little consistency between the two languages:

	WATER	AGUA
Noun:	a glass of water	una copa de agua
Verb:	water the garden	----------
Noun Adjunct:	water meter	contador de agua
Adjective:	watery substance	----------

In Spanish one cannot say "Fire the furnace" or "Man the guns," but we can say "Open fire" (Abran guego) or "A man broke his leg" (Un hombre se rompio una pierna).

One of the major principles in much modern second-language teaching is that a point-by-point comparison of target and background languages will provide the basis for more efficient

instruction. Contrastive analysis is applied to every aspect of language: to phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. It is even extended to cultural patterns that are thought to affect language learning and use. Through contrastive analysis we attempt to determine 1) what language patterns are identical in both languages, 2) what patterns in the target language have no near equivilents in the native language, and 3) what patterns in the background language have enough similarity to patterns in the target language (without being identical) to constitute major points of interference. Once the teacher has discovered these points of interference, he/she can predict and be prepared for his students' difficulties.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Williams, p. 111.

[2] Saville and Troike, p. 13.

[3] Williams, p. 108

[4] Williams, p. 35

[5] Examples taken from the Hartford, Ct. English as a Second Language Curriculum.

[6] Articles, for example, were omitted from this overview because of the scope of their rule-governed occurence.

[7] Harris, p. 11.